

George Brown News

A newsletter for staff, faculty and alumni of George Brown College

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Students make career connections at largest ever technology job fair

When HVAC students like Jerome Mattison think about making connections, it usually involves the soldering of copper pipes and fittings. But in late January, Mattison and his classmates learned that the connections made with employers outside of college were as valuable as those made inside their labs and classrooms.

On January 31st, George Brown hosted a record 44 companies at the Technology Networking and Career Fair. For many, it was their first opportunity to network and connect with the industry.

The annual event, while accommodating 44 organizations, could in fact have been much larger. "We had to close registration due to space limitations," says Kelly Goring, Industry Liaison Office (ILO) Manager. For the ILO, the department responsible for planning this and other Technology events, this comes as excellent news. "We've had great success getting employers to reach out to our students," adds Goring. "We're always looking at ways to accommodate more employers, since there is such a high level of interest." Event attendance has been steadily climbing since the College hosted 30 organizations in 2004. The 44 attendees of the 2007 roster included employment agencies, professional associations like IQCS, and companies looking to hire students from all Technology programs.

Faculty, students, and employers alike agreed that the event was a success. Architectural Technology student Jin Hyeong Park appreciated the opportunity to glean "useful information" from employers. "You should hold this event more often!" says Park. Nikki Sandhu, a recruiter for Adecco, was pleased with the number of students in attendance at the Career Fair. "The turnout was great!" she says.



However, bringing students and industry together isn't enough. In response to employer concerns that students were unprepared for the fairs in previous years, the ILO enlisted some help. Since the office took over the planning of the event in 2003, it has teamed up with Career Services to help better prepare students for the fair. Career Services offered an expanded selection of workshops in January, including Creating Great Resumes and Career Fair Preparation.

Computer Systems student Alfred Brobbey took advantage of the free workshops, and they paid off. "I will definitely be coming back next year," says Brobbey. Alana Bonney, a student of the Construction Science and Management degree program, was also well-equipped thanks to the help she received from Career Services. "I came with cover

letters and resumes, and had looked into the companies online beforehand," she says.

It makes sense that helping students put their best foot forward is exactly what the ILO aims to do, considering GBC's ultimate goal is to get students the careers they want. To address the needs of our students, Goring and her staff (Dayna Murray, and new recruit, Alexis Trejgo) are beginning to make some connections of their own. To date, they have helped to bring industry professionals and career workshops into the classrooms. But the newly expanded office has much bigger plans. "We hope to ensure that it will be mandatory for each student to have a professionally-checked resume," says Goring. For the ILO, the official opening of the new Casa Loma Career Centre couldn't have come at a better time.

— By Dayna Murray

Learner Profiles study sheds light on remedial education needs

Student success at college, as well as success on the job after graduation relies on many things—not the least of which is the fundamental skills of reading, writing, speaking and understanding English. We have a strong commitment to provide the sort of education that results in students being workplace-ready when they graduate. Before that, as well, we have a responsibility to provide students with the skills they need to successfully complete their education.

For a certain population of our student body (indeed, for many students across the post-secondary environment), that means remedial English. Assessment testing is not done for all programs, of course, and the number of students requiring remediation varies by program, but overall about 40 per cent of the first year students require some remediation of their English skills. Such findings are not reflective of the entire GBC student body, but they do signal that many students can use our extra help.

As we continue to gain a better understanding of how we can best support those students who need remediation, a faculty-led study ("Learner Profiles") was carried out as part of Academic Strategy initiatives. Three programs were examined—Practical Nursing (PN), Pre-Health Sciences (PHS) and Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (HRAC). It is important to note the results of this study cannot be extrapolated across the entire GBC student body. The research team was made up of Communications faculty Linda Bamber, Trisha Yeo and Jessica King.

Professor Ailsa Kay, seconded from teaching to lead the Academic Strategy Enhanced Communications projects, says the study learnings will help GBC design better strate-

gies to assist students and ensure they're successful at GBC. "Specifically, the results give direction on the type of remediation needed in the programs we looked at, but also suggest we might want to think differently about the question of remediation—for example remedial help may best be targeted to both the language profile of the student, as well as the profile of the program," she says.

Study Highlights

Findings from the Learner Profiles assessments show that students in the programs examined have remediation needs not only in writing, but also in reading and speaking. For example, in PN 25 per cent were unable to pass a grade-12 equivalent reading assessment, and 49 per cent did not successfully complete a post-secondary level oral task. In PHS, 82 per cent failed a grade-12 equivalent reading assessment.

Some students are also getting to college with writing, reading, and speaking skills below the level that is "remediable" within the current structure of remediation. This is a level the research team calls "developmental." Forty-seven per cent of PHS, 20 per cent of HRAC, and 12 per cent of PN students have developmental-level writing skills.

The Learner Profiles team also correlated language profiles to test results. In doing so they made two surprising discoveries. First, poor results on speaking tests were not limited to the ESL population (L2); findings show that the native speakers of English in the study (L1) also have speaking skills below post-secondary level. Second, while both L1 and L2 students scored at the remedial level in writing, more L1 students than L2 scored at the developmental level (in PN).

Program demographics provide insight into these results. In PN, 88 per cent of the L2 group hold post-secondary degrees.

These students typically fare well on "academic" tasks, do fine on reading and writing assessments, and are able to acquire a second language faster than L2 students with lower levels of education. However, many of these students still need help gaining the language proficiency needed to ensure success on the job.

There are other challenges. One third of students in PN and PHS fall into the category current research on language acquisition calls "L1.5." These students learned English between the ages of 5 and 16 while they were still developing critical thinking skills in their first language. This timing can cause a delay in the development of critical thinking ability. These learners may have excellent conversational skills (equivalent to L1), but they lack the academic language skills required to support decisions or opinions, summarize, hypothesize, or analyze a problem.

These findings have clear implications for both language assessment and remediation. The good news is the current, single level of remediation (COMM/CESL 1003), with some curricular modification, appears to be sufficient to meet the needs of learners assessed at the "remedial" level in writing.

One course is not sufficient for all, however. It cannot, for example, meet the needs of learners at the developmental level nor address all four skill areas (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). As well, current placement testing does not yet measure reading, speaking, or listening skills.

Further, CESU/COMM 1003, while attempting to address L1 and L2 issues separately, does not effectively deal with diversity across categories—an internationally educated professional has different language learning needs than an L1.5 student, for example. "With different programs marked by different student demographics, the study results point to a need to examine different approaches to remediation," says Kay.

Addressing the communication and language needs of our students remains a key priority of GBC, and has been a specific focus of much of the work being done as part of the Academic Strategy. The Learner Profiles study has provided further understanding of the challenges some of our students face and will prove useful as we chart strategies to provide help where it is needed for our students.

NEW STAFF ID CARDS: It's about to get much easier to identify yourself at work. New GBC Staff Cards are being developed. Designed to make identification easier, the cards will facilitate safety and security for employees and eliminate the need to show personal ID. The new cards will also be used to access college services, including the library. Stay tuned for more information about the cards over the next few weeks.

We can create a better world, say speakers

George Brown has the power to help create a better world for young people today and for future generations, staff were told at an Academic Strategy conference in late February.

Aboriginal leader and educator Roberta Jamieson kicked off the two-day conference with a call to action. She discussed the young people of her community, and said they needed appropriate help—that the College could provide—to achieve their potential.

She encouraged College staff to take a long term view of the impact of their work on the seventh generation following us. "See what life we can make for our children," she said.

The following day former school teacher and aspiring politician Justin Trudeau (son of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau) echoed the same theme in a wide-ranging speech to staff at Casa Loma.

College staff are role models for students, and it is their job to show how youth can find relevance in the worlds of work and volunteer service, he told an attentive audience.

"You certainly didn't choose the field of education for the money or the glory," he quipped.

Staff reacted positively to the speeches, in which both speakers endorsed the core values of the College's Academic Strategy.

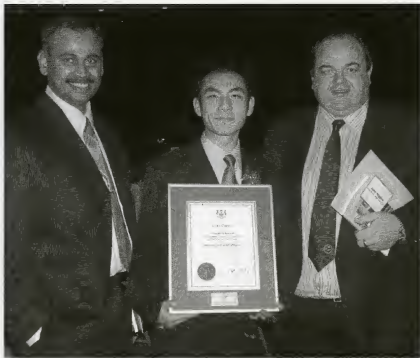
Professor Susan Heximer, who attended both speeches, says having high profile speakers at the College impressed her.

"Bringing people of this quality in made us feel relevant and that we matter," she says.

Several hundred staff attended the conference—choosing from more than 30 workshops, most focusing on the implementation of the College's Academic Strategy. It was sponsored by the College's Staff Development and Academic Excellence departments.



President Anne Sado welcomed aspiring politician Justin Trudeau as a keynote speaker at the Academic Strategy conference on Feb. 27.



WINNING LOOKS

Top photo: Chef School graduate Vicky Cheng (centre) proudly displays the Premier's Award he was given at a gala awards dinner during the Ontario Colleges conference in Toronto on Feb. 19. He's flanked by his college mentors Chef School Externship Co-ordinator Charlton Alvares (left) and Chef School Director and Corporate Chef John Higgins.

Bottom photo: George Brown was presented with an Ontario Colleges Award for Community Partnerships for the Pathways program at the Ontario Colleges conference on Feb. 19. President Anne Sado (left) and George Brown Board of Governors Chair Geri Markvoort (right) were on hand to congratulate Pathways Mentoring Co-ordinator O'Neil Edwards (second from left) and Brenda Pipitone, George Brown's Director of Community Partnerships. The Pathways program provides support to students from the downtown Regent Park neighbourhood.

President Anne Sado Q & A

Q: I've been reading more lately about immigrant education, the importance of training and education as immigrants settle into their new communities, and the difficulties some new Canadians have finding a job that fits their credentials. Can you bring us up to date on George Brown's role in this important issue?

George Brown College has been a leader in immigrant education and integration for several years. A significant portion of new immigrants settle in the Toronto area, and our college's student population is very much reflective of that diversity. For example, a third of our students note English as their second language, and 43 percent of GBC students were born outside of Canada. The priorities of new immigrants are clear—after housing and education for their children, finding a job is an immigrant's primary concern.

Beyond the obviously important social benefits, there are strong economic advantages to helping new Canadians find success at college and beyond. Ontario's prosperity relies on a skilled and educated workforce, and workforce growth is coming from the immigrant community.

At GBC we have specifically focused on immigrant education by recently creating a stand-alone department. We work on several fronts with government and partners in the community, such as JVS, COSTI and Skills for Change, assisting new Canadians in getting the skills and education that will lead to meaningful jobs. In the language of GBC's International and Immigrant Education department, "George Brown serves to facilitate the seamless integration of immigrants into the educational, economic and social structures of Ontario, and to act as an advocate for immigrant issues within the College and external bodies through programs, services and research."



The measure of a chef: Senada Peragic from Thistlethorn Collegiate Institute makes sure to pour exactly the right amount while preparing a dish as part of George Brown's 2007 Chefs in the City high school culinary competition in late February.

A majority of immigrants that arrive with professional or technical qualifications need some type of training or upgrading to get the type of job for which they were trained outside of Canada. GBC delivers or partners in several Bridging programs designed to close the gap between foreign training and Canadian requirements:

- Career and Work Counsellor for Internationally Educated Professionals
- College Teacher Training Program for Internationally Educated Professionals
- Computer Programmer for International Professionals
- Construction Management for Internationally Educated Professionals
- Early Childhood Educator Bridging program
- Manufacturing Engineering Technology – Surface Mount Microelectronics program

We also recently introduced a new program that provides internationally trained teachers with the language skills, training and experience here to enable them to secure a teaching job at a community college.

Other key services we offer include Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

that assesses prior education and life experiences for credit, and Advising is a free service to immigrants to help them select the right College program given their backgrounds.

George Brown is an active participant in the Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIITE) project. Supported by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, CIITE is investigating barriers faced by immigrants, and developing and implementing college-system services that will improve integration of immigrants into the workforce. Our participation has already taught us a great deal, and as CIITE and other multi-college projects unfold we expect new insights and data on immigrant labour-market information and entry supports (such as internships).

In January we began a government-funded project (Occupation-specific Language Profiles) which is allowing us to determine students' language skills upon graduation and measure those against employer-identified English skills needed for specific jobs. The results will reveal where gaps exist and provide direction on the type of job-specific language training our students require.

With a large immigrant student population, and as one of the country's most diverse colleges located in the world's most diverse city, George Brown is well positioned to take a leadership role in immigrant education. We continue to develop our Immigrant Strategy to ensure we are doing all that we can to integrate new Canadians into their new communities and help them get the jobs they want.

George Brown News is a publication of the Marketing and Communications Department, George Brown College at 200 King St. East, Room 542E, Toronto, ON M5T 2T9
Story ideas? Editor: Neil McGillivray
(416) 415-5000, ext. 2060 or nmcgilliv@georgebrown.ca
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